Morning In The West

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MORNING IN THE WEST

OTHER BOOKS BY THE AUTHOR

Grey Knitting
The White Comrade
The New Joan
Canadian Cities of Romance

Morning in the West

A BOOK OF VERSE

By

KATHERINE HALE
(Mrs. John Garvin)

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TO MY MOTHER

Katherine Hale Byard
who means song to me

147908

CONTENTS

I. Morning in the West

	Page
Cun-ne-wa-bum	11
Ballad of Jasper Road	14
Buffalo Meat	17
Return of the Trappers	21
An Old Lady	23
Spanish Pilots	26

II. Women

Enchantment	29
She Who Paddles	30
Down Near the Glen	31
The Bolshevik	32
Pavlowa Dancing	34
Calvé in Blue	35
Sign to Trespassers	36
Silver Slippers	38
A Fabulous Day	39
Christmas Eve	40
To Marjorie Pickthall	41
I Who Cut Patterns	42
Poetesses	44

III. Going North

	Page
Going North	47
Study in Shadows	54
Northern Graveyards	56
Stony Lake	58
Trade	59
Snake Island	60
Juniper Ring	61
White Slumber	62
Crimson Pool	63

IV. Miracles

Miracles	67

MORNING IN THE WEST

CUN-NE-WA-BUM

Portrait in the Royal Ontario Museum

Cun-ne-wa-bum—"one who looks on stars"—
(Feel the singing wind from out the western hills)
"The tip-end of a swan's wing is her fan,
With a handle of porcupine quills."
Here is the artist's name, Paul Kane;
Painting in forty-seven, at Edmonton, I see.
That was when prairies were untamed,
And untamed this young Cree.

What an incantation in her name!
Magic as her dark face underneath the stars;
There is sword-like wind about it wrapped,
And echoes of old wars.

Cun-ne-wa-bum!
When turtle shells were rattling,
And the drums beat for the dance
In the great hall of the Factor's house till dawn,
You sat without the door,
Where the firelight on the floor
Caught the red of beads upon your moccasins.

At evening through the grassy plains the wind
Came shouting down the world to meet the
dawn,

And with the wind the firelight rose and fell,
Answered with flame his shrill barbaric yell,
And died like whining fiddles at his feet.
And through it all the constant sound of drums—
Did your feet move to drums?

The men from near and far,
Crees and Sarcees,
And a Blackfoot brave or two,
Made rhythm of a dance that moves like rhyme
To the rush of wind, and rattles swung in time
To the constant, constant, constant beat of drums.

No Indian woman dances in the light;
Silent they sit together out of sight.
But to-night I think this artist from the East,
Who had come to paint the natives hereabout,
Found a splendid flare of crimson on the feast
And moved near the open door,
Where the firelight on the floor
Caught the red of beads upon your moccasins.

So it is, O Cun-ne-wa-bum,
Who were wont to look on stars,
That you sit for ever here,
Like a wild lost note from far,
From the days of ancient war
And of towered stockade and guns
In the Edmonton of seventy years ago.

In your buckskin and your beads
(Feel the sudden wind from out the western hills)
The tip-end of a swan's wing for your fan
With a handle of porcupine quills.

BALLAD OF JASPER ROAD

I know a Blackfoot Chief
  Whose name is Dark Plume Bill.
He lived beside the Jasper Road—
  And lives there still.

He wears a queer checked coat
  And a grey bowler hat,
But looks his ninety-seven years
  For all of that.

His gaze is unconcerned
  As he sits in the sun,
And counts the flashing motor-cars
  That pass, one-by-one,

And trucks, like dreary monsters
  Of a prehistoric day,
That are rushing down the road
  In their crazy way.

"The first Red River cart,"
  Said Dark Plume Bill to me,
"Came lurching up the prairie
  Like a ship at sea."

(Oh, the long blue road,
  And the stealthy pad of feet
And the first patient ox-cart
  With its sail-like sheet!)

"Then the carts came faster,
And at the time of snow
We camped outside the Palisade,
Seventy years ago.

"Arrows, guns—big Buffalo hunts,
Much long fight,
And fires to warm the tepees
For the feasts at night.

"But when they laid the steel
And the long trail awoke
My Indian tribe had scattered
Like the wigwam smoke."

His gaze was unconcerned,
Yet he scanned the way he knew,
As though from out its clamour
He had found a vanished clew.

And I thought it must be strange
To sit in the sun
And look upon an ancient road
That you had seen begun

Out of silence and mystery
And crafty, ambushed death,
Come alive with men, and monsters
Of such an alien breath.

(Oh, the long blue road
And the stealthy pad of feet
And the first patient ox-cart
With its sail-like sheet!)

BUFFALO MEAT

A Daughter-in-law Writes

It takes a letter sixty days to go—
An Indian boy runs down the trail to-night.
What shall I write to you?
My mind is full of gossip of a town
That you have never dreamed of.
So—shall I tell you of our shacks,
Huddled behind the tall stockade?
Our guns, with muzzles set against the prairie?
What if I write the truth!
Your son is now a savage;
By that much more I love him!

If I should say
I can stand all this tropic, summer heat
And menial tasks and crowded alleyways,
And fat squaws lounging in the sun,
And even water out of tainted wells,
And long, rough prairie rides—
All for the sake of autumn,
And its short, magic days of pure content!

If you could know my mind!
A little British mind two years ago;
To-day a sort of crowded, pagan scroll,
Recording strange old customs
And legends, various as the Indian tribes,
And prayers and songs and dances.

Songs that are old as earth itself,
Dances as elemental:
Skin drums and tom-toms,
Rattles of turtle shell, and whirl of winds
Against the amphitheatre of hills.
You will remember they were playing Sheridan
When we left London!
I can count every lilac spray on the old drawing
room chintz.
I hope—I hope you have not changed it since!

Let me begin again.
If I should say
I love this small, rough shack,
For it has made me brave—
Braver, at least, than when I saw it first,
And saw a sea of prairie
And the dim forms of buffalo herds
Darkening the far horizon!
I am braver now than when the halfbreeds came
Racing towards us on that first wild day,
Mad messengers to frighten us to death—
Servants of trappers and the Nor'-west men—
Those halfbreeds! feathers dangling, tomahawks!
That was in summer.
Still the buffalo lingered,
Cropping the blue-grey grasses,
Plunging in the muddy wallows,
Always near us.
I could almost touch a shaggy flank.

Two years ago to-day, in Piccadilly—
That tea-shop place the day before we sailed—
He said, "It may be wild enough out there,
But I shall keep you safe—
Oh, I shall keep you safe!"

We loitered through that first bright autumn
And on the edge of winter had no meat.
Who wants meat, here, must follow it—and kill.
So, like a band of pilgrims, we set out—
Unguarded women are not left behind—
Walking beside our husbands all the way.
Far out of sight, the Indians
Search for the roaming herds.
They are on splendid ponies.
We settlers are the country's parasites.
When Mary Scott, the factor's wife, and I,
With two young squaws, were left a day in camp
We learned an incantation.
Another day when we were on the trail
My wedding ring was taken from my hand
Just as a warning,
A little necessary bright horse-play,
To show us who was master.
Five days of march and then the broad plateau—
White plains, brown beasts,
Red, flying figures of the Indian guides,
Bonfires at night and sleep in soft skin bags,
Warm blood of slaughter—

But—
It takes a letter sixty days to go,
Even at this season, when there is no snow.
Autumn has fallen on London.
I can see you in the sweet old room.
Please do not change a thing until I come!
Fires will be lit, your velvet curtains drawn,
And when you read my letter, dearest one,
Pray that some great day I may have a son
To mingle past with present.
For now each treacherous hour seems all of life;
I am as much a hunter as a wife,
To whom the summer is a breathing space,
Who waits for autumn
And trots beside her husband, through the grass
That shudders in the late November wind,
Or lies like frozen foam beneath our feet,
Looking for buffalo meat!

RETURN OF THE TRAPPERS

Against the rolling snowdrifts,
Misted by the frost-fog,
Dwarfish, pigmy figures,
See them come!
Open the gates of the great stockade,
Welcome them home.
There's my Red-Scarf!
I can almost hear him snarling,
"Marche! Marche!"
Down at old Fort Garry,
I have heard them say
That they take the women,
Who dog-trot behind them
All the way.
Not out here! Not out here!
With the glass at minus forty
Half the year!
There's the first big husky—
Think you hear his bell?
That is Henri leading;
Yes, among a thousand halfbreeds,
I would know his yell!
What you bet the sleds hold?
There's a slide!
Why that drift the other day
Stretched a half mile wide.
What you bet the sleds hold?
Fire the gun!
Here the women come, pell mell.

They've got ears, those Indian women,
Not much need to fire the gun!
Now we're in for days of steeping,
Matching, drying, sorting—rum.
Hear the whips crack!
Hi! Hi!
See, that's Henri!
Three, four, five—
Not one train lost.
Here they come!

AN OLD LADY

Madame de Courament excels at Bridge.
Hers is a clever hand,
Coloured with age and wrinkled,
But beautiful and tapering too,
Quite in accord with this old, stately room,
With crystal chandeliers,
And flowers and the warm tapestry of books.
Silent the cards fall.
Down the long avenue a dog howls at the moon,
A far, frost-sharpened sound.
The wind swirls up a little storm of snow
That blows against the casement.
A skilled opponent, Madame makes few mistakes
Like that a moment since,
When suddenly the dog howled—and we lost a trick.
She has a flashing wit,
Dinners at Rideau Hall are incomplete without her.
As someone said the other day,
"These elderly, elaborate folk
Are like a passing pageantry,
Gorgeous and of another day."
Silent the cards fall.
Again the far-off dog howls at the moon.

An hour later, "Chateau Laurier" she told the chauffeur.
And, alert and gay,
Wrapped in her sables,

She was motoring me the long white way to town
And gossiping of little this and that.
But just as we were nearing city lights
She said, "I saw you noticed that dog's bark.
It sounded almost like a wolf's;
It took me back to the Red River days.
Oh, it was fifty years ago, my dear;
I was as young as you . . . It seems like yesterday.
Hardships! I loved it all!
Even the wolves, baying far out of sight,
Failed to disturb our rest
When we were safe at home.
The Indians were quite friendly—
And the eternal glamour of the snow!
And yet to-night, just when I heard that sound,
Sharpened by frost,
I felt an old pain strike me,
The knife-like thrust, before a child is born.
I was alone that night.
My husband had been called to Edmonton,
My Indian maid had let her family in
Looking for whiskey.
I dared not call to her.
For hours the Indians danced and sang and yelled.
I watched them from my icy-cold bedroom
Through great cracks in the floor.
Before they slept they sat crouched by the fire,
As I crouched up above in fright and pain.

And all night long I heard the wolves;
They kept a sort of savage company
With my own stifled cries.
To-night, my mind went back a moment strangely—
I always thought he had the sweetest face
Of any of my seven . . . But then he was the first!"

She raised her glittering hand
And found the speaking tube, to modify her chauffeur's pace.
"And that, my dear, was fifty years ago," she said.
"The prairie was a very different place—
I never thought, then, I should come to Bridge!"

SPANISH PILOTS

To Agnes C. Laut

These were the ragged peon crews,
Half-bloods of Aztec women,
Of Spaniards and adventurers
Who were not seeking heaven!
But out on the broad seas driven,
And from the Horn to Sitka,
They searched for deep-sea findings
The whole unknown way,
With "small ringing of bells
And no trumpet blare,
Empty stomachs, and empty guns,
But plenty of prayer."
And if they failed of the findings,
Nothing behind but the branding irons,
Or slavery in the mines.
Yet they sang
As they sailed in their rickety death-traps;
They laughed as they rode,
And they sank as the rip-tide caught them fast
With a cry to the Virgin,
A prayer to the Virgin—
There was plenty of prayer at the last!

WOMEN

ENCHANTMENT

I never see a bluejay
But I think of her;
Never hear that hoarse "dear—dear"
From a tree-top stir,
And the answering call
Far, far away,
And the flash of azure—
Oh, she would stay
Listening in the forest,
Loitering through the silence,
Hearing calls and singing
All the livelong day!

SHE WHO PADDLES

She who paddles swiftly,
  Lithe and brown in the sun,
And dances, lithe as an Indian princess
In the barbaric days of splendour
  Might have done—
She can laugh and jest too,
Play and wine and dine;
But none of these things have wooed me,
Bound me close by a mystery,
  Made her eternally mine.
For we have found still places
  Deep in the wood;
Climbed a ledge of grey rock
  Where a pink-legged heron stood;
Heard the distant loon's cry;
Watched a lonely bird fly—
  And she does not stir then,
  Does not turn to me then,
But softly walks in the forest
  In no great need of men.

DOWN NEAR THE GLEN

(In fear of fairies Irish women sometimes disguise their boys as girls)

"I dress him sweet," the woman told me,
"All in white with a frill of lace.
See his hair
An' the curls that's on it!
Do ye know a girl with a safter face?

"If so I keep him till five or over,
There's not a one will steal him then!
With a saft wee girl
They'd never bother,
The thievin' fairies down in the glen.

"Never take chances!" the woman warned me,
"For a boy is the thing that sticks to your heart!"
But I was mad!
I had decked mine bravely;
He was moulded a man from the very start.

THE BOLSHEVIK

I met a woman of the Ward;
She was in gay attire;
Her blouse was blue, her toes were through,
Her ear-rings flashed like fire.

A little boy with lustrous eyes
Tugged at her coloured skirt;
His skin was warm as the southern born,
And he was caked in dirt.

Two women on the sunny street—
We fell to friendly talk
Of grocers' ways, and how it pays
To purchase as you walk.

I asked her, as a neighbour might,
If she had news to tell.
She answered me, "Oh, quiet-lee,
I think we soon raise hell!

"Too much we give to grocer-men;
Too much the rich have place;
More war to-day is the only way
To put rich in hees place!

"We speak a leetle, you and I,
Some papers scatter round,
Soon rich will be, quite quiet-lee,
All trampled on the ground.

"My man, he has a job all right,
But he might have much more.
Make leetle war, and there we are:
No rich man at our door."

The dusky boy with lustrous eyes
Listened to his mamma,
And then said he, quite quiet-lee,
"Most dear, to-day I saw

"One motor car that I will own
When I am grown a man!"
His beauty spoke, in eyes, in throat,
As just sheer beauty can.

And she forgot the little war,
The beckoning blood and dirt;
She smoothed his curls, so like a girl's,
And smoothed his gay striped shirt.

"Grow up, be good, my little boy;
One motor you may run!"
Her eyes burned deep, war fell asleep
As she looked on her son.

. . . . .

I met a woman of the Ward;
She was in gay attire;
Her blouse was blue, her toes were through,
Her ear-rings flashed like fire.

PAVLOWA DANCING

Footsteps of youth through the springtime playing,
Footfalls of snow in a blue mist straying,
The rose of Russia in a bright wind swaying—
A rose of fire and snow.

Voices chanting everywhere, but no word said,
Fairy bells from ancient towers signalling the dead,
Light love tuning viols while the dance runs red—
A flaming dance of death.

White barbaric winters and a sky star-strung,
All the hidden pathways, all the songs unsung,
Caught in flying footsteps over wild music hung—
She dances, and the Czar lies dead.

Oh, the cries, and martyrdoms, and fatal morns,
Scarlet nights and fiery wine and bitter scorns,
Dancing in a rose of joy from a field of thorns—
Rapture from a land of thorns!

CALVÉ IN BLUE

Here is blue fire
That burns mere youth away
And leaves sheer passion.
Out of the coloured flame
What pageantries arise,
As that caressing tone,
Through shimmering veils of harp and flute,
Seems to peer ghost-like down
Into a million hearts in nights long gone—
Into a million eyes!

There is a black mantilla
Of ancient Spanish lace
Over the deep blue gown.
The voice of Carmen sings again,
The mocking voice of Carmen, scarlet still
With love and certain doom.
In it there swings a sword,
And through it blows a laughing word—
That strange, and quite inevitable word
That time can never kill.

SIGN TO TRESPASSERS

Was ever a woman
  Quite alone for a day?
Other women will come
  Who should stay away.

Because my casement's open,
  As I wait here for you,
Comes the faint Persephone
  Trailing through the dew.

She has lived a thousand years,
  Clasped her cosmic rose;
Why she comes to trouble me
  Only heaven knows!

And there's another woman
  Keeps whispering in my ear,
Till she has the whole house
  Pierced through with fear.

Some wandering nun it is,
  Whose lips can only pray,
Has made my house a cloister
  In this dreary way.

And even now your taxi
  Must be racing through the town.
(Will you love me, O my lover,
  In this pale yellow gown?)

I have written out a sign
That I hope they will obey—
"For all Peering Women
There is no Right of Way."

SILVER SLIPPERS

I never wore slippers
On sweet April evenings,
But boots made for roads that we travelled in woe,
For morning and evening
Meant rough wayside places
And feet that were slow.

But now silver slippers,
Light-mannered, bright slippers,
Great mirror-like floors and a green velvet lawn,
Where we beckon with laughter,
With music, with dancing,
Sad youth—that is gone.

A FABULOUS DAY

Oh, the days of the week they are constantly seven!
And as certain to stay as the fixed stars in heaven.
But my heart that denies them will wander away
To find a more likeable, well furnished day
That I know exists somewhere, invisible, real,
And shining with moments the seven days steal.

The stocking I've wanted to darn since the spring,
The folk-song, forgotten, that calls me to sing,
The little old lady I hurry to see,
The cumbersome caller, long promised to tea,
Or the half-hidden passion pushed by through the
week:
These surely may people the day that I seek.

Sometimes I shall play with a soul never born:
A companion I met on the far side of morn.
I shall nod at the losses I wept for last night,
And find my to-morrows expectant and bright.
But mostly I think the whole twenty-four hours
Will be spent in designing a new bed of flowers;
For everyone's heart, when it wanders away,
Has its own things to do on a fabulous day.

CHRISTMAS EVE

My house is arrayed
In its garlands of Christmas delight;
A red rose is this house
In its holly and soft candle light.

But my heart is as cold
As the heart of a colourless rose,
And I feel the dead weight
Of your holiday blanket of snows.

TO MARJORIE PICKTHALL

The day you died, that April yesterday,
I was alone in sunny meadow places,
When, turning a dark clump of wintry leaves,
I caught a glimpse of exquisite fresh faces,
Renewing earth.

Then, thinking of another April day
When you and I found bloom beneath the snow,
I sent you happy thoughts across the world,
Not dreaming it the day you were to go—
But yesterday.

Yet, oh, not lost! how many a year shall turn,
And youth and age, lonely for some bright way,
Shall sudden feel you on the face of earth
And push back death, and pluck you like the may—
Immortal Song!

I WHO CUT PATTERNS

I who cut patterns,
As every soul must do,
Fret myself with longing
For themes that are new.

All these fashions
Were moulded years gone by,
And, like the mask of politics,
Are coloured with a lie.

Even the treasured love motif,
This thing of you and me,
It must so carefully be cut
To keep us bound, yet free.

And death, the sombre casket
Of centuries of song,
And war, and rivalries and creeds,
These we have used too long.

To-day I found a charming thing
Of silk and golden lace,
And yet, beneath the filigree,
What an old, wrinkled face!

Still, I believe in legends
Of laughter and delight,
And words all coloured with the sun
And perfumed by the night.

And I've a mind to leave the shops
And fashions old and new,
And cut my pattern from a wind,
And baste it up with dew.

I who cut patterns,
As every soul must do,
Fret myself with longing
For themes that are new.

POETESSES

You who loved all lovely things
And wrought in jewelled lines;
You have gone your gracious ways
That are patterned in dim stones
Of perfumed, faint-hued words;
You were a thing so feminine
That even of war you sang in tender notes.
But now another one has come,
Who is herself at war.
Her songs are keen and glittering,
For she has felt the magic fire
That you did long ago;
But now the fire has burned clean through
And forged a sword of steel.
Swinging swords are women's songs
That gleam as hard as diamonds do,
And mean to cut tradition.

And yet those jewelled lines!
Strangely the ancient magic works,
Strangely the same fire lurks
And burns imprisoned there
In your dim, opaled words,
That run like paths in heaven
Paved in mosaic of sweet stones,
And make a scented highway for our feet,
Who wield these swinging swords.

GOING NORTH

GOING NORTH

I

White Porches

Just as we left the avenue
I saw a golden butterfly
Flutter against the windshield.
I felt the motor take the breeze,
As gaily as a yacht might do
Upon some tidal river of the seas.
We sailed a broad grey asphalt
Out past the red brick houses,
And fringy, ragged outskirts
To where the fields begin.
And Pickering, Whitby, Oshawa,
Flashed by like friendly postscripts
Of the Town's lengthy scroll,
With dusty little detours,
And cobblestone communities
To break the highway's hundred miles
Of river-like content.
We smiled at sleepy Main Streets,
And joyous village gardens,
And sprawling crimson orchards,
Heavy with ripened fruit.

Each mile or two a butterfly
Danced near the blazing windshield,
"The same gold butterfly!" we said,
"And the same village street!"

We passed a hundred porches,
Ancient and modern porches,
And some of them were white ones,
And those we loved the best.
Many a bed of phlox we passed,
Lilac and pink and white,
And they were gardens of delight
Along our asphalt river-front—
Sheer gardens of delight.
We loved all purple calicoes
On cheerful, ambling ladies,
Their morning work already done,
Sauntering through a mile of sun
Up to the general store.
Sometimes they sat on porches,
Narrow but shining porches,
Serenely shelling peas.
"Just what is life," we wondered,
"For those who sit contented
Throughout the magic summer
On these pale country porches,
Patching—knitting—talking—
Serenely shelling peas?"

II

Grey Willows

Then we turned north.
A railway train rushed by us;
The blue-bloused engineer
Hung from his stifling cab,
Waving a careless hand.
And in a moment we had lost
All thought of shining porches
And sleepy village streets.
This was a thinner world
Of smaller, leaner orchards;
Taller, barer houses;
Drier, keener air.
Here and there grey willows,
With an eerie whisper,
Bent above a narrow stream
That languidly slipped by.
And over us the noon-day sky
Turned brazen. Stark tree trunks
Showed where bush fires had run,
Charred columns of lost forests
Dried by the sun into fantastic shapes.

This narrow stream,
Unnursed by tree-held snow,
Dwarfed by the fires, fifty years ago
Would have raced by us foaming,

Even in summer, through a world of green—
A lost green world of butterflies and fern,
And soft anemones in spring;
But now at every jagged, ugly turn
Only a brush heap where the woods had been.
The very soil is scorched—
Scorched the brown ferns
Descended from the ones that long ago
Were licked into a burning wind of flame.
Poor, narrow little stream,
Bereft of that green dream
That holds the snow! . . .
There was a bit of rock a mile ago,
The preface of the North!

III

Bush Road

A soft swamp road,
For forty miles through bracken and through fern,
Smooth as a snake,
With turn on twisted turn—
Turns that meant few surprises;
Yet, as it wrinkled on its way,
The softly yielding earth that overlay its granite
Seemed to say
That once the lumber trails ran here,
And once the voyageur
Sang as he paddled down the foaming stream,

And once the woodmen came,
Great gangs of woodmen
With the axe and spike,
Who set up rude encampments.
Then, to hoarse shouts and orders,
To laughter and to oaths,
To roaring fires at night and whiskey-haunted
songs,
The soft green forest fell.
It died robustly as it lived,
And had its will of singing and of strife,
An ardent, powerful, various sort of life;
A more heroic fate
Than this of late—
A trail up to the playground of the North,
A bracken-haunted, snaky road,
A soft surprise to strangers, a delight.

IV

Painted Rock

Then the North took us,
Forced us through rocky walls,
Tore at our tires,
Gave us no inch of earth
Upon our steady climb.
Yet even here, beside the cruel road,
Were scraggy plots of farm,
And wood-piles neatly stacked,
And shacks, and gloomy faces.

Then an acre of more fertile land,
Pine trees and woods,
And suddenly, like a blue cup held high,
The lake Mazinawa . . .
All silence, silence, silence—
Dark colours filling the blue cup.
And, like a purple stain against the sunset,
The great rock of Mazinawa,
Sacred to Indian tribes how long ago!
A thousand years ago?
Why should one care to know!

It looms up larger than I dreamed;
Roadways of rock
And canyons full of light;
Niched balconies for pines bent all one way;
Small birds in flight,
Dashing against the dark
Of that vast rocky flank,
Whose sides of iron seams,
Laid under golden lichen,
Have been a place of dreams
And of brute sacrifice.
What if it has a power to draw us near
As in the days of fear?
When from the rocklands of the Georgian Bay
Or through the bush roads whence we came to-day,
But then on foot, soft-padding all the way,
Or in the war canoes
They crowded to this small blue lake of theirs
And an old shrine . . .

What are we floating towards
In this small, low canoe?
A naked, ceremonial singing past
Seems to reach out and whisper.

STUDY IN SHADOWS

The Rock at Bon Echo

I

Once in the twilight aisles of Amiens
I thought I knew what shadows were,
Creeping in golden dust and greying dust,
And trooping down dim flights of measured air,
Liquid in spacing, that those arches span.

II

But just last night, before the moon was up,
Our little boat stole close against these crags
That out-rear arches and reject the dark.
Yet gradually the purple of the rock
Melted before it; and again they came
Creeping in golden dust, and greying dust,
And crowding down those giant flights of stair
That open slowly as eternity,
To hold the feet of shadows, lost in night.

III

Then I remembered Götterdammerüng—
How before doom falls on the gorgeous host,
Slowly there drifts across the empty stage
A smoke-cloud, lonely as a passing soul.

In very truth the gods return to you—
Great rock that blazes colour in the sun—
And, as in the Valhalla of old song,
Parade before our eyes the whole day long
And make a glorious end,
As with you they are folded in a sleep.
No cloud foretells their doom, but wings of birds
A moment sweep your side—then fall away.

NORTHERN GRAVEYARDS

Stony fields and lonely roads,
  Meagre hamlets, very lean,
And most prosperous graveyards
  Lying all between.

Each few miles a graveyard,
  With its crouching column
And its urns and headstones,
  Very dark and solemn.

But with what an accent!
  Yellow, purple, red,
Lie the votive offerings
  To this public dead.

Close beside the railway,
  Where the smoke drifts high,
These are decked in garlands
  For the passerby.

Even in the winter,
  Breaking through the snow
Immortelles beguile us,
  When the train runs slow.

They are strangely cheerful,
  All these plots of ground
That have lost the loneliness
  Of the living. Here abound

In a comradeship increasing
  Those who in their hour
Reaped a dreary harvest,
  Missed a magic flower.

Over them the smoke-wreaths,
  Snow, and whispering grass,
And the voice of neighbours,
  Sighing as they pass;

While the urns of iron
  And the barbarous vases
Chant a willing ritual
  To forgotten faces.

So they sleep together,
  And their shades may say:
"Wave to us, O restless traveller!
  We are glad to stay."

STONY LAKE

By southern seas I have seen purple stones
Throw back the shadows of the waves and hills.
On the Ægean, so the stories run,
Greek youths, with many a saffron-coloured sail,
Rode flame-like to the rhythm of the gale.

Again, on the bright shores of this small lake,
Purple of hills and pink of northern rocks.
To-day I met a sail-boat in the wind
And at its mast a brown Canadian boy—
He was as splendid as his mate of Troy.

TRADE

It might have been two hundred years ago,
For all the difference in her way or mine,
That her canoe, with paddle dipping slow,
Just as the sunset ran to embers low,
Stopped at my rocky door.

With fish and basketwork she plied her trade,
And I, to help a little money last,
Answered her barter with a coat I made
Of coloured wool—oh, many seasons past!
We were both satisfied!

SNAKE ISLAND

"Ages ago," my Indian says
(As we are fishing in a cove
Of this green island, with its trees and shacks),
"Here was wild grass and many snakes.
After a while they disappear,
For soon the white man comes, and makes
Houses like these to live in!"

So the old name is suddenly made new.
Snake Island! . . .

Ages ago, perhaps, the trees were elfin
And tall grass towered to the skies,
Until, to all those narrow, screen-like eyes,
This was a dazzling fen,
Perplexed with tangled fern,
Peopled with glittering prey;
Dense borderland to where the black pools lay
Whose captives twist and turn.

Burrowing, boa-like, harlequin snakes,
Your day was brilliant and flashing enough!
Snakes casting skins in continuous slough,
Grass snakes and ring snakes, on dragon-flies bent.
Was there a charmer, with musical pipe,
Lured you a moment? Some Indian charm
Surely touched you with sorcery, gave you alarm,
Ere the people who meant to build houses like these
Came and killed you—
And killed the wild grass.

JUNIPER RING

Juniper ring on the granite rock,
  Deep and green and perfectly planned;
  Living with you I understand
Circle-magic of old.

You had a sister in mystery—
  Was it only an April ago
  That a crocus cup on a bed of snow
Promised eternal things?

It will be longer, Juniper,
  Till earth declares you ready to break,
  And you fade of the havoc her brown hands make
That are covered with mystic rings.

WHITE SLUMBER

Who has come to that farthest island
Beyond White Gull Bay?
There is a little tent among the birches
Since yesterday.
Those birches are the palest things
Even in the morning sun!
Among them the tent has suddenly blossomed,
As the white flower of a night-blooming cereus,
Silently, deep in some forest of sleep,
Might have done.
Who are they? What dreams must be theirs,
Who have found such a magical camp unawares?

CRIMSON POOL

Even you, dark pool—
Even you feel death.
On your soft brown surface
There are deep reflections
Of a fiery breath.
To the waiting forest
Death does not come creeping
As it comes to men;
It comes shouting, waving banners,
Burning out its way with torches,
Hanging garlands now and then.
All the green walls of your silence
Hung with crimson,
Even you, dark pool—
Even you feel death.
On your soft brown surface
There are deep reflections
Of a fiery breath.

MIRACLES

MIRACLES

We said: "The Universe shall kneel!"
And so the dreams of long ago
Have bound the winds and stars,
And lashed the waves to giant bars,
Till Light itself is chained.
We fly on wings of steel;
We beckon Mars.
Almost the frightened worlds, I feel,
Must in their journeys swerve and wheel
Far from the Will of Earth.

Suppose the Universe should speak!
And on some thundering street
Quite suddenly, before our eyes
A fountain, cool and sweet,
A careless, laughing little thing
Should dance upon the air
And all the very wise of us
Be held in wonder there! . . .
Suppose one day an angel,
Through some caprice or whim,
Should walk along a city way
That we might talk to him;
And all the men and women,
And all the horses too,
Should bow and fall before him,
As mortals used to do! . . .

I wish that some quaint miracle
Might happen, even to-day,
Whereby the Universe should speak
And men kneel down to pray.

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